

FOREWORD

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

WILLIAM C. FOSTER

Washington, D.C., August 5, 1964
by Charles T. Morrissey
for the John F. Kennedy Library

Also present: Nedville Nordness, Public Affairs Adviser,
U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency

Mr. Morrissey: Do you recall the first time that you met
John Kennedy?

Mr. Foster: The first time I had substantive contact with
was when he phoned in the fall of 1960. He
wanted me to join a group that he was going to consider for
his military and disarmament problems. Coincidentally, I had
also been called twenty-four hours before by Mr. Nixon to join
the same type of group, which I accepted. Since I am a
Republican, I told Mr. Kennedy that I would always be available
to help, but I didn't think it was quite proper to sit formally
on both advisory groups. I didn't hear from him directly again
until five or six weeks after his inauguration as President.

During the period after his election it would seem that

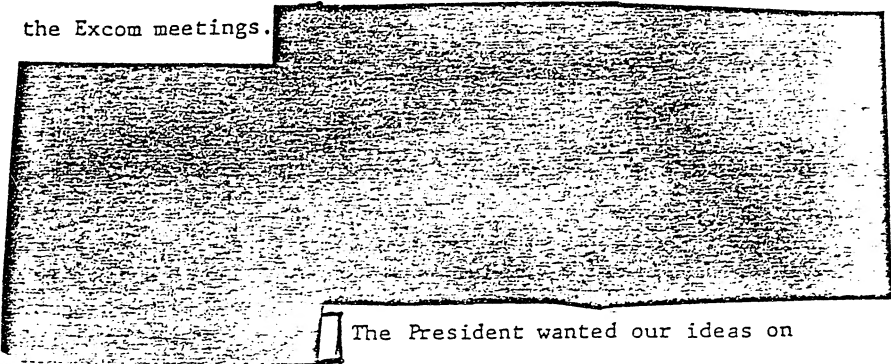
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close. The actual negotiation of the Treaty followed events in Cuba in the fall of 1962.

As to Cuba itself, I sat in on perhaps four or five of the Excom meetings.



I The President wanted our ideas on covert inspection since ACDA had spent much of its research funds in this field and we had a lot of background on the subject. So I sat in on four or five of those meetings, including the famous Friday night meeting when the President received the capitulating letter.

I had an opportunity to observe the President during those meetings where the possibility was faced over three or four days of pulling out all of the nuclear stops. And while he became progressively more tired looking, he never lost his poise, his judgment, or his restraint in giving the Soviets a

chance to withdraw. He kept the military from striking prematurely. They were, apparently inclined to favor, on several of these occasions, sinking some of the Russian ships, plus air strikes on land. The President was absolutely in control of himself, the situation, and the group around the table. I didn't attend all Excom meetings, particularly at the beginning. I had to go out of town to make a speech for Secretary Rusk when he had a "diplomatic illness" following discovery of missiles in Cuba. But I did get in on the last several of them and watched the drama unfold.

Probably because of that Cuban episode, the President received a confidential letter on December 29 from Mr. Khrushchev accepting a suggestion of President Kennedy's that now that Cuba "is behind us" the U.S. and U.S.S.R. should take steps to move ahead in arms control. Incidentally, this part of the Kennedy letter was prepared by us at the President's request. Khrushchev didn't answer the U.S. letter for about two months, but then he said: "Let us first take a look at nuclear testing. I am prepared to negotiate."

The President referred that letter to us for a draft response. We prepared a response covering a proposed Presidential